DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 178 RC 024 123

TITLE	Report on Ontario's Northern Schools.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	18p.; Produced by People for Education.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.peopleforeducation.com/tracking/regional/northnrpt.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	American Indian Education; Bus Transportation; Canada Natives; *Educational Equity (Finance); *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment; Foreign Countries; *Funding Formulas; Geographic Isolation; Rural Schools; School Funds; *School Personnel; School Size; *Small Schools; Special Education
IDENTIFIERS	French Language Schools; *Ontario (North)

ABSTRACT

Ontario's funding formula fails to recognize the unique needs of northern school boards, which cover immense geographic areas, have many small schools, and enroll a high proportion of Aboriginal students. This report examines school size, enrollment, and staffing in northern Ontario schools, drawing on 2002-03 tracking reports of provincial schools. Northern Ontario elementary schools averaged 221 students, compared to 373 in the rest of the province, while northern secondary schools averaged 481 students, compared to 1,007 elsewhere in the province. Since 2000, 43 northern schools have closed, all of them small schools. Under funding formula requirements, fewer than one quarter of northern schools had sufficient students to qualify for a full-time principal or a full-time teacher-librarian. Only 54 percent of secondary schools qualified for a full-time guidance counselor. Northern schools often lacked specialist teachers and special education personnel. Also unrecognized by the funding formula were the need to pay higher salaries to attract teachers to northern areas; the huge geographic areas covered by French-language school boards, which serve 17 percent of the northern population; the special needs of Aboriginal students; and the high cost of student transportation. Recommendations are offered for revising the funding formula. (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 479 178

Report on Ontario's Northern Schools

People for Education

April, 2003

RC 024123

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jacqui Strachan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

© **People for Education, 2003**

P.O. Box 64, Station P,
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2S6

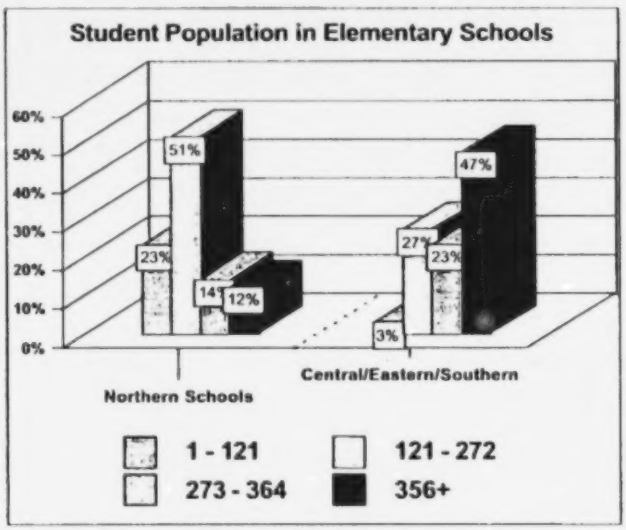
phone: 416-534-0100
fax: 416-536-0100
e-mail: p4e@peopleforeducation.com
website: www.peopleforeducation.com

People for Education is a group of parents working together in support of fully publicly-funded Catholic Public and French education in Ontario.

Report on Ontario's Northern Schools

Overview

The provincial education funding formula fails to recognize the unique needs of Ontario's northern school boards. As a result, northern schools have fewer resources, less support for students at risk and less staff than their southern counterparts.



Most northern boards cover immense geographical areas. They have relatively small student populations and their numbers continue to decline each year. Northern boards are at a disadvantage because they have a high incidence of small schools in small communities. The funding formula is geared toward larger schools. The funding formula also fails to recognize that northern boards have a higher proportion of Aboriginal students. These students are more likely to have special education needs and are lagging far behind non-native students in literacy and numeracy.

Our surveys show that when staffing in northern schools is compared to staffing in the rest of the province:

- 32% of elementary schools and 21% of secondary schools in the north have part-time principals; in the rest of the province, fewer than 10% of schools report their principals are part-time.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Only 33% of northern secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 90% of secondary schools in the rest of the province.
- More than one third of northern schools report they have no access to the services of a psychologist, whereas in the rest of the province less than 10% of schools report no access to psychologists.

Many northern boards face the challenge of providing consistent equitable educational services to a diverse range of students in widely dispersed communities. For example, with an area of 16,000 square kilometres, the Near North DSB in North Bay must serve:

- inner city settings in North Bay,
- seven First Nations (elementary and secondary plus a large number of First Nation students who are not residing on a reserve),
- a wide socio-economic spectrum,
- enrolment decline, and
- a number of single-school communities.

Introduction

The data used in this report is compiled from People for Education's *2002 Elementary School Tracking Report* and *2003 Secondary School Tracking Report*. We have focused on the areas where northern schools differ most markedly from schools in the rest of the province.

School size, enrolment, and staffing

> This is an example of a benchmark that did not recognize the reality of small schools – schools built over a number of decades with Ministry approval, and of a size appropriate for the particular local community. If the school is full and its capacity is 250 pupils, why should it not be entitled to the funding for a full-time administrator and secretary?...[H]ow is it conducive to student achievement to have a part-time academic leader?
>
> *Lakehead District School Board*
> *Submission to the Rozanski Task Force*

In Ontario, boards with a large number of smaller schools are at a disad-

vantage. The funding formula sets the number of pupils needed to generate staff at a level higher than the enrolment of most schools. And northern boards have a higher incidence of small schools than all other regions in the province, many with enrolments of fewer than 100 students. (See Appendix A.)

- Elementary schools in northern Ontario have an average enrolment of 221 students, compared to an average enrolment of 373 students in the rest of the province.

- Secondary schools in northern Ontario have an average enrolment of 481 students, compared to an average enrolment of 1007 students in the rest of the province.

Percentage of Schools in Northern Ontario with sufficient students to generate funding for staff

Staff	Funding Formula requirement	% of Northern Schools qualifying
Principal, full-time, elementary	364	**12%**
Principal, full-time, secondary	909	**25%**
Vice-principal, full-time, secondary	667	**33%**
Secretary, full-time, elementary	272	**27%**
Secretary, full-time, secondary	188	**75%**
Teacher-librarian, full-time, elementary	769	**0%**
Teacher-librarian, full-time, secondary	909	**25%**
Guidance counsellor, full-time, elementary	5000	**0%**
Guidance counsellor, full-time, secondary	385	**54%**

> The Sudbury Catholic District School Board data indicates that 70.4% of our schools are below 360 students. Two schools within this group are located in small, isolated communities where they function as community hubs even as their enrolment declines....A per pupil funding approach does not generate sufficient revenue in smaller schools that may have many of the same fixed costs and the same mandates as schools with greater enrolment. This situation leads to the under-servicing of larger schools in order to provide service for smaller schools.
>
> *Sudbury Catholic District School Board*
> *Submission to the Rozanski Task Force*

To keep small schools open with adequate administrative staff, boards make cuts in other areas or do without full-time staff.

- only 68% of northern elementary schools have a full-time principal, compared to 90% in the rest of the province.
- 79% of northern secondary schools report have a full-time principal, compared to 99% in the rest of the province.

Hiring teachers for Northern Boards

Northern boards have trouble attra ting teachers, and often have to pay higher salaries, with incentives (much more than the funding formula allots). There is also a high turnover rate, because new teachers often use these appointments as an entry level, and then move on.

Secondary School Programs

It is a challenge for school boards to provide an adequate range of programs and courses in small secondary schools. For many students, it is impossible to graduate with an adequate number of appropriate credits from their local, small secondary school.

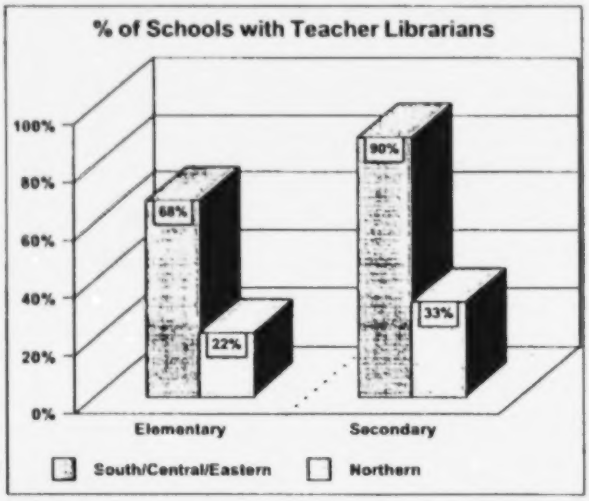
> In addition to the numerous programs and choices, there is more flexibility in the timetable of a bigger school, which in effect gives students more options. If there is only one section for a course, i.e., Calculus, the numerous conflicts with other courses often make it impossible for a student to take that particular course, whereas this is not seen in a school that can offer two or three sections of the same course.
>
> *Conseil scolaire de district catholique Franco-Nord*
> *Submission to the Rozanski Task Force*

School Closings

In the last three years, at least 43 schools have closed in northern boards, all of them small schools. In some northern boards, many schools remain under review. Boards keep small schools open and staffed by making cuts in areas like full-time principals, custodians, librarians and programs.

Library

Despite evidence that well-funded and staffed libraries are a positive indicator of student achievement, northern schools fall far behind the rest of the province in the provision of teacher-librarians. Northern boards are unable to afford teacher librarians because the funding formula sets the number of students necessary to generate funding for one librarian at such a high level. None of northern elementary schools and just 25% of northern secondary schools have sufficient student populations to generate funding for a teacher-librarian.



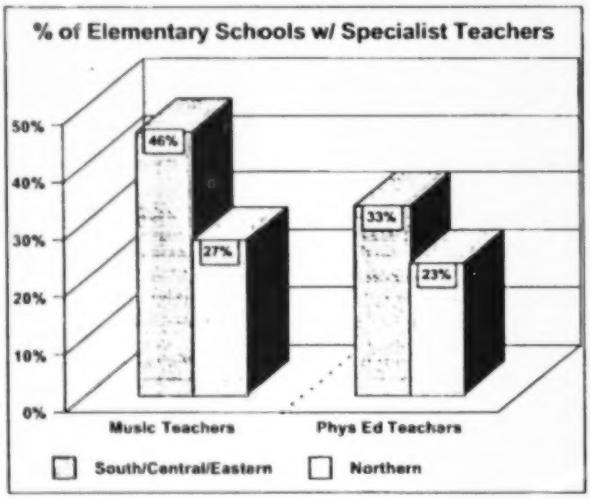
Northern school libraries are less likely to be open full-time and less likely to be staffed by a teacher-librarian. This places students in the north at a double disadvantage. In many northern communities, the school library is the only library and students do not have access to public libraries in their communities as do most students in southern Ontario.

- 22% of northern elementary schools report having a teacher-librarian, compared to 68% of schools in the rest of the province.
- 33% of northern secondary schools report having a teacher-librarian, compared to 90% of schools in the rest of the province.

Specialist Teachers

School boards with a high proportion of small schools, some with only three or four staff members, are less likely to have specialist teachers in elementary schools. Over the last six years, the number of Ontario schools reporting specialist teachers has dropped every year. This trend is most apparent in northern schools. In the north, there are almost half as many schools with music teachers and 30% fewer schools with physical education teachers, compared to schools in the rest of the province.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Special Education

Northern school boards, which serve huge geographic areas and small student populations, face serious challenges in providing adequate special education assessment and support. Most special education funding (Special Education Per Pupil Amount (SEPPA)) is based on the premise that all boards have a similar proportion of special education students and that special education services can be distributed evenly among schools.
Neither premise holds true for northern boards.

Many northern boards have a higher than average proportion of special education students. Special education services cannot be distributed evenly or provided in one central place because the schools are too small and too far apart. Thus, in northern boards, many special education students go without service. Where special education programs are available, students must spend hours on buses as they travel to distant schools that have appropriate special education programs.
This transportation is not recognized by the funding formula.

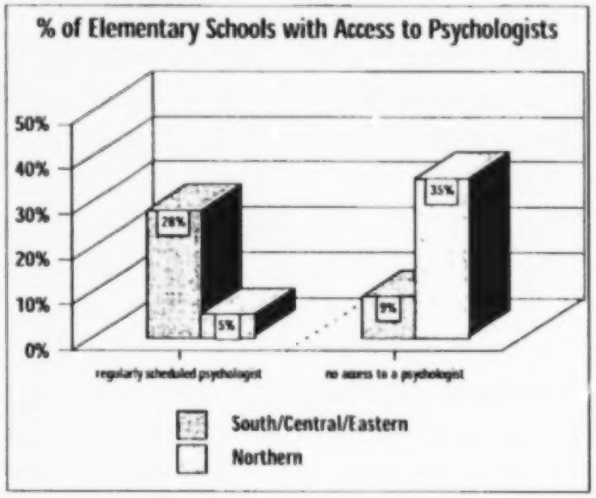
Psychologists
Over one-third of elementary and secondary schools in the north report they have no access to psychologists.

Psychologists assigned to school boards assess students, make recommendations to teachers and parents as to appropriate special education placements and assist students and their parents in cases where psychological help is needed.

A large majority of schools in southern, eastern and central Ontario have

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

access to psychologists either on a regular basis or on call, but over a third of northern schools report they have no access to psychologists.



In most cases psychologists are needed to meet government requirements for claims for Intensive Support Amount (ISA) special education funding.

Without psychological assessments, boards may not qualify for ISA funding. Boards in the north often must fly in psychologists to do the assessments. Without extra funding, they cannot afford to fly them in. Without the assessment, they do not receive extra funding.

> ...a number of regions in the province do not have ready access to professionals who can provide assessments, etc. required for students to meet ISA profiles....[The government should] ensure adequate money is provided for the purchase of assessment so students will be able to meet ISA requirements.
>
> *Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board Submission to the Rozanski Task Force*

- 35% of northern elementary schools did not have access to a psychologist, compared to 9% of schools in the rest of the province.
- 5% of northern elementary schools reported having the regularly scheduled services of a psychologist, compared to 28% of schools in the rest of the province.
- 57% of northern secondary schools did not have access to a psychologist, compared to 9% in the rest of the province.
- 0% of northern secondary schools reported having the regularly scheduled services of a psychologist, compared to 25% in the rest of the province.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Social Workers

- 62% of elementary schools in the north have on-call or regularly scheduled access to social workers, compared to 76% of schools in the rest of the province.

French-language Boards

According to Statistics Canada, 4% of Ontario's total population have French as their mother tongue, but in the north, 17% of the population list French as the mother tongue. In some areas, like Nickel Belt and Timiskaming-Cohrane, over one third are French-speaking.

The Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms promise French-language students equality of education opportunity. The provincial education funding formula is meant to ensure that all students experience this equality. But French-Language boards in Ontario, and especially French-language boards in the north, are finding it increasingly difficult to provide their students with an education that is comparable to that of English-language boards.

French-language boards have facilities, enrolments, and average school sizes that are smaller than those of English-language boards. Because of this, they cannot benefit from economies of scale available to many English-language boards.

French-language boards in the north operate ov · vast territories, making it difficult to share resources. This, combineo w .h increased travel time for staff and the need for French-speaking personnel and specialized resources, results in substantially increased costs for French-language boards. But if they want to keep their current students and attract new ones, they must assume these costs in order to provide similar programs and services to their co-terminous English-language boards.
Northern French-language boards are further disadvantaged because the Ministry of Education does not recognize the actual area covered by many boards. For example, in the Conseil catholique du Nouvel Ontario it takes more than seven hours by road to visit different parts of the board. In these boards, communities are dispersed in small areas over an enormous geographical expanse. The Conseil scolaire du district du Grand Nord serves both Sudbury and Long Lac which are nine hours apart, but the Ministry does not recognize all the area in between as a part of the board.

Aboriginal Students

> Education has changed radically over the last ten years, but for First Nations Students, there has been nothing. Things have only gotten worse.
>
> *Matawa First Nation*
> *Submission to the Rozanski Commission*

Nine per cent of the population in northern Ontario school boards are Aboriginal, compared to less than 1% in the rest of the province. In the northwest, this number rises to 34%. (See Appendix B.)

At the hearings of the government's Education Equality Task Force, a number of presenters expressed concerns about the high proportion of Aboriginal students who arrive at school "inadequately prepared to learn, particularly with respect to their skills in the language of instruction." They said Aboriginal students are less likely to achieve the government standard in Education Equality and Accountability (EQAO) tests, less likely to graduate from secondary school and more likely to change schools frequently.

According to Dilico Ojibway Child and Family Services in Thunder Bay, many Aboriginal students perform below grade level, and many have significant gaps in language-based subjects and literacy. Aboriginal students often go without needed learning assessments and appropriate program modifications despite long-standing academic difficulties: "Students are rarely formally identified, i.e., IPRCs have not been held and ISA claim applications have not been made on behalf of students, nor even initiated, despite the severity and long standing of needs."

Submissions to the Task Force described other challenges to aboriginal students. One elementary school principal noted that Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) was not an identified criteria for special education support, but affected the learning abilities of many of her students. She said the funding formula assumes that approximately 10% of students require special education assistance; in her school the number is closer to 70%. The mobility of Aboriginal students (frequent moves from school to school, or a pattern of October to May attendance) was cited in a number of submissions as a barrier to special education identification, adequate exposure to curriculum, and student success.

Busing

In northern boards, small communities and large geographic distances make the provision of adequate transportation services a constant challenge. Children endure the longest bus rides in the province, with potential detrimental effects on their homework, marks, sleep patterns, study habits and fitness levels.

- Northern elementary schools reported students on buses for as long as four hours per day. In the rest of the province, schools reported their longest bus rides were just over three hours return.

- 70% of secondary schools reported one-way bus rides of one hour or more, compared to 46% of secondary schools in the rest of the province.

When the province took control of education funding in 1997, it had not developed a model for transportation funding. It cut all boards' funding by 3%, then provided funding on a per pupil basis. It failed to recognize the cost-saving efforts of boards that share busing with other boards in their regions. Fuel and insurance costs have increased dramatically since /1997, and aging bus fleets have not been upgraded.

One-time grants of $23 million in 2000 and $29.3 million in 2001 were provided to supplement transportation budgets, but there is still no funding model for busing.

> This Board has been in a serious declining enrolment situation for the past four years....The transportation grant, based on the level of funding in place in 1997 and discounted each year based on total enrolment has been and remains completely inappropriate. Busing requirements over this vast geographic region do not decline in the same ratio as total enrolment. The Board has been providing joint transportation services with its six coterminous Boards since 1973....However, the geographic and demographic obstacles faced by this Board and its coterminous Boards are significant and to date do not fit any proposed provincial model.
>
> *District School Board Ontario North East*
> *Submission to the Rozanski Task Force*

Fundraising

In the last five years, because of cuts to education funding, parents increasingly feel pressured to raise money for basic school supplies. The number of Ontario elementary schools reporting they raise money for classroom supplies has increased by 68% since 1997/98.

Most of the fundraising is done by a very small proportion of schools, mainly in very well-off communities in southern Ontario. It means that these schools are able to provide more textbooks, computers, classroom supplies and library books for their students, creating a virtual two-tier system for education. Schools in northern Ontario are able to raise considerably less than schools in the rest of the province.

- Elementary schools in the north raise an average of $1,200 for basic school supplies, compared to an average of $4,268 in schools in the rest of the province.

Recommendations

The funding formula has a number of special purpose grants that apply to northern boards: grants for remote and rural schools, small schools, the Learning Opportunities Grant, and the Transportation Grant. But schools must be very small to qualify for the small schools grant and, even then, the funding in the grant is insufficient to provide adequate staff. The Learning Opportunties Grant provides some funding for Aboriginal students, however, it fails to address many of the challenges they experience. Even the Transportation Grant fails to recognize the unique needs of northern boards.

People for Education recommends that the government revise the funding formula in the following areas:

Small Schools:

- adjust the Small Schools criteria to allow elementary schools with up to 200 students to qualify
- increase the Small Schools Grant to include funding for one extra full-time teacher per school
- create a designation for small schools in single school communities that cannot be closed and fund appropriate staff for those schools, including a principal, a secretary, a teacher-librarian, caretaking staff and, in schools from grades 7 to 12, a guidance counsellor
- lower the per pupil allocation for full-time teacher librarians to 500 students in elementary schools and 600 students in secondary schools

Staff:

- provide funding to ensure that boards with small populations have access to psychologists and social workers
- recognise the challenges faced by northern boards to attract and keep teachers and fund the extra costs incurred

Transportation:

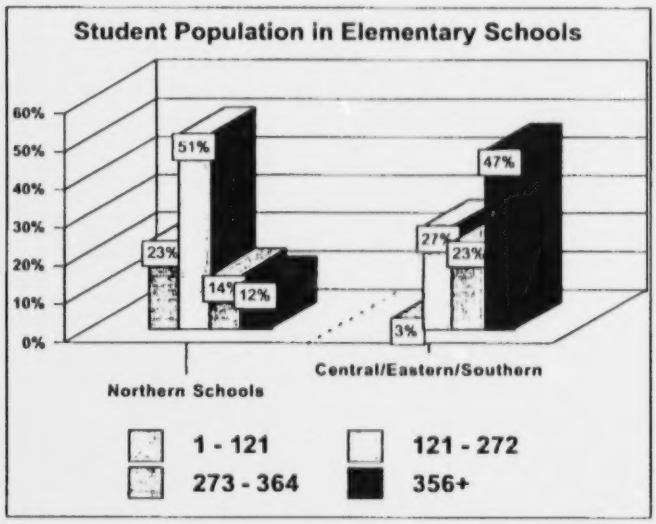
- update benchmarks annually in the transportation formula to reflect current fuel costs
- set a limit on the amount of time any student may spend on the bus per day
- provide funding for late buses in secondary schools so that stu-

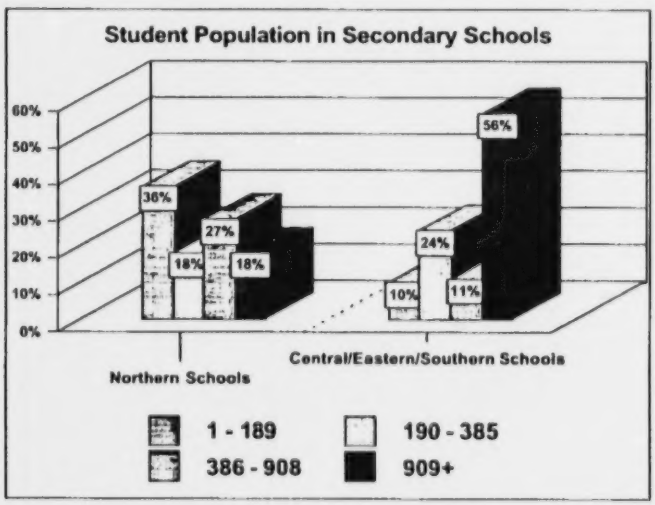
dent can participate in activities outside school hours, and
- acknowledge the additional funding required in rural and remote areas to transport special education students to locations for programs and support.

French Language Boards:
- implement the recommendations for French Language Schools in the Rozanski report to ensure that each grant in the formula recognizes the higher costs experienced by French-language boards

Aboriginal Students:
- amend the Languages Grant in the funding formula to recognize that some Aboriginal students do not have English or French as their first language
- broaden the criteria in the Learning Opportunities Grant and in special education funding to address issues of mobility, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and to recognize the unique needs of many Aboriginal students
- implement the recommendations for Aboriginal students in the Rozanski report, including
  - a new grant targeted at the educational needs of Aboriginal students who are not living on reserves,
  - that the ministry require boards that are eligible for this grant to spend it on programs and services for Aboriginal students and to publicly account both for the expenditures and the results achieved and
  - that the Province work with Aboriginal leaders and the federal government to ensure that there is an integrated approach to and adequate funding for the education of Aboriginal students

Appendix A: School Sizes





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

data from Statistics Canada, 2001

Appendix B: Aboriginal Population by Federal Riding

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC REPRODUCTION RELEASE

I. Document Identification:

Title: Report on Ontario's Northern Schools

Author: People for Education

Corporate Source:

Publication Date: April 2003

II. Reproduction Release:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please check one of the following three options and sign the release form.

✓ Level 1 - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.

___ Level 2A - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

___ Level 2B - Permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no option is marked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

Sign Here: "I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature:

Printed Name: JACQUI STRACHAN

Address: P.O. Box 64, Station P
TORONTO, ON, CANADA
M5S 2S6

Position: MANAGING DIRECTOR

Organization: PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION

Telephone No: 416-534-0100

Date: JUNE 24, 2003

III. Document Availability Information (from Non-ERIC Source):

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org